

Bureau of Land Management

Sierra Front-Northwestern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council Northeast California Resource Advisory Council

Joint Session
Thursday, April 5, 2001
Airport Plaza Hotel, Reno Nevada

Summary Meeting Minutes

Opening Business

The joint session of the two BLM Resource Advisory Council was called to order at 9 a.m. by Tina Nappe, vice chair of the Sierra Front-Northwest Nevada RAC. Tina co-chaired the meeting with Lee Chauvet, chairman of the Northeast California RAC.

Attendance

Sierra Front-Northwest Nevada RAC: Tina Nappe, Susie Askew, Karen Boeger, Gerry Emm, John Falen, Mark Farman, Jerry Hepworth, Hugh Judd, Robert Kautz, Tebeau Piquet, Bennie Romero, Bill Roullier, Sherm Swanson, Larie Trippet. Absent: Jacques Etchegoyhen.

Northeast California RAC: John Erquiaga, Steve Kerns, Lee Chauvet, Wesley Finley, Dan Heinz, Huel Morphis, Jim Jeskey, Gerry Nordstrom, Nancy Huffman. Absent: Henricus Jansen, Frank Bayham, Tim Garrod, Ken McGarva, Jack Hanson.

BLM Staff attending: Nevada State Director Bob Abbey, Nevada Associate State Director Jean Rivers-Council, Winnemucca Field Manager Terry Reed, Surprise Field Manager Susie Stokke, Nevada Wilderness Program Leader Steve Smith, California Wilderness Program Lead Paul Brink, Nevada Chief of Communications Jo Simpson, California External Affairs Chief Tony Staed, Eagle Lake Field Manager Linda Hansen, Alturas Field Manager Tim Burke, Carson City Public Affairs Officer Mark Struble, NORCAL Public Affairs Officer Jeff Fontana, Winnemucca Writer-Editor Jamie Thompson.

Guests: Scott Sonner, Associated Press; Susie Bunyard, Surprise Valley Chamber of Commerce; Patricia Cantrall, Modoc County Board of Supervisors; Susan Lynn, Public Resource Associates; Chuck Dodd, Oregon-California Trails Association; Don Klusman, California Association of Four Wheel Drive Clubs; Mary Nordstrom, Janesville, CA; Jim Linebaugh, Solider Meadows Ranch.

Opening Comments

Nevada State Director Bob Abbey thanked the RAC members for attending this first joint meeting of the neighboring councils.

Abbey said the BLM has an excellent opportunity to work with all interested parties on development of a management plan for the new NCA and the 10 wilderness areas in the region. He said BLM's first task was to get information to the public about the new legislative designations, and commended the Winnemucca and Surprise field managers and their staffs for hosting public information open house meetings and developing public information materials. Abbey said the meetings were useful in easing some public concerns about future management of the region, but he cautioned that "it will not be business as usual" particularly in wilderness areas.

Abbey said the BLM continues to work with Nev. Sen. Harry Reid's office on the senator's possible introduction of legislation to address technical amendments to the legislation that designated the NCA and wilderness areas. These amendments would probably deal with access issues.

The state director expressed several expectations:

- The BLM will move forward with the planning effort.
- The planning effort will be done in a timely and open process.
- There will be early and continuing public outreach to increase the level of understanding.
- There are opportunities for the State of Nevada to participate fully in the planning process as a member of the planning team.
- Interests in California will be recognized and residents will have the opportunity to participate fully in the planning process.

In response to questions from RAC members, the state director and Winnemucca Field Manager Terry Reed addressed the following issues:

- **Grazing:** Livestock use will continue where it occurs now. The biggest change will be wilderness access for maintenance of range improvements, because use of motorized equipment is prohibited in wilderness without specific approval. BLM will work with permittees to determine which facilities must be maintained with mechanized equipment.
- **Congressional or Presidential actions:** The state director noted that legislation establishing the NCA and wilderness areas was enacted by Congress and is now law. Reversing the designation would take another act of Congress. He told Modoc County Supervisor Pat Cantrall that people who have concerns about access to the area need to be at the table during the planning process.

- **Boundaries:** In response to comments from John Falen and Larie Trippet, Reed said BLM will be “ground truthing” the legislative boundary of the NCA and wilderness designations, to ensure the official map is consistent with on-the-ground conditions such as road setbacks and private land boundaries. A report will be prepared. Part of the report will address wilderness management issues that are beyond BLM’s management authority, such as changing boundaries to avoid developments such as homes, campgrounds or utility transmission lines. The BLM does not have authority to suggest major boundary changes. Several council members suggested that the RACs develop recommendations for consideration by Congress or the Governor of Nevada. State Director Abbey assured the members that any suggestions or recommendations forwarded to the BLM will be taken seriously.

- Dan Heinz suggested that the council’s need to carefully define the difference between the RACs advising the BLM on management of the NCA and wilderness and attempting to modify existing legislation. He noted further that efforts were made in the legislative process to exclude major geothermal areas from wilderness areas because geothermal development within them would present a major conflict with the intent of the wilderness legislation.

Summary of the Legislation

Surprise Field Manager Susie Stokke summarized the intent of the legislation creating the NCA and wilderness areas. The region has long been recognized for its unique attributes, including sections of the Applegate-Lassen Trail that are largely unchanged since the days of the California Gold Rush. It also contains unique segments of Great Basin ecology, cultural resources sites eligible for national landmark status, significant archaeological and paleontological values, and opportunities for solitude in an increasingly busy world.

Stokke said the legislation provides for public access, allows for continuing multiple uses, restricts motor vehicles to existing roads and trails and still provides opportunities for hunting, fishing, trapping, and large recreation events such as Burning Man.

She pointed out that the legislation requires the BLM to develop a management plan within three years and provides for development of facilities to provide visitor information.

Stokke said the BLM has taken several actions to date:

- An organization has been established that involves both Nevada and California BLM – a recognition of the shared BLM jurisdiction in the area. An NCA manager and primary staff will focus on recreation, wilderness and restoration activities. The Winnemucca and

Surprise field offices will continue to administer grazing and wild horse and burro programs as they do now.

- The NCA manager will report to the Winnemucca Field Manager. Detail positions will be filled soon, with permanent NCA staff positions to be filled later.
- An interim wilderness management strategy has been developed.
- An interim law enforcement strategy has been developed. It will focus first on public information about the new designations and the new wilderness regulations.
- A preplan – the first step in development of a management plan has been completed is now circulating for internal BLM approvals. The preplan outlines planning issues and resource inventory needs.
- Six open house informational meetings were held (Susanville, Alturas, Cedarville, Reno, Gerlach and Winnemucca). In these meetings, many people found that impacts on their access and driving were not as large as they feared.
- The legislation did not change the BLM's grazing regulations. Grazing allotments will still be assessed for conformance with BLM's land health standards. BLM has continued to use authority granted in appropriations legislation to reissue grazing permits for allotments that have not yet been assessed and where NEPA analysis has not been completed.

Public Comment Period

Discussion of the NCA legislation was suspended for the public comment period. The following comments were made:

Bill Dart, American Motorcyclist Association: His organization is concerned with preserving access for motorcycles and other motor vehicles. Use of vehicles is essential for people to explore the vast and harsh country encompassed by the NCA legislation. These vehicles are part of the custom and culture of this region. He urged the BLM to preserve the ability of OHV users to use existing two-track routes to explore the area, and said the agency should not arbitrarily close routes.

Don Klusman, California Association of Four Wheel Drive Clubs: The organization is

concerned that the NCA does not become “de facto wilderness” as the group believes has occurred at other national conservation areas. He said grazing and motorcycle use has been reduced in California’s King Range NCA and does not want to see that happen here. Klusman encouraged formation of an oversight team to work with the agency during the planning process. He stressed that access to the region is the key to allowing for public recreation.

Jim Linebaugh, Soldier Meadows Ranch: Access and services, such as electricity and telephone service, are important to the area ranchers. Linebaugh said he does not want to see restrictions that would impair the ability of ranchers to do what is needed for sound range management. Some areas should be excluded from the wilderness boundaries.

Pat Cantrall, Modoc County Board of Supervisors: The rights of humans to make a living by using the land need to be considered. Management needs to consider human habitat as well as animal habitat. Speaking as a private citizen (not an elected official), Cantrall said she supports conservation area, and the need for people to have access to the areas. She said the BLM should designate a power corridor through the area so that any geothermal power developed could be exported.

Susie Bunyard, Surprise Valley Chamber of Commerce: Cedarville and Surprise Valley will be the northern gateway to the NCA. The community can provide full visitor services and opportunities for historic interpretation. Bunyard suggested that Cedarville be designated a gateway community, that some NCA staff be stationed in Cedarville, that Surprise Valley residents be afforded the opportunity to participate on planning teams, and that public scoping meetings be held in Cedarville and Alturas. She submitted a resolution from the chamber of commerce (attachment).

Susan Lynn, Public Resources Associates: A long supporter of the NCA and trail preservation, Lynn expressed hope that an advisory committee extending beyond the RACs will be established to advise the BLM on NCA and wilderness management. She added that the nation – the world’s largest consumer – needs to focus more on energy conservation.

Member Roundtable:

Tina Nappe called on each council member for their ideas of issues for consideration:

Steve Kerns: Feels the group should find a way to work with the BLM to send a message to Congress that the boundaries should be adjusted. The RAC members represent on-the-ground constituencies.

Nancy Huffman: Likes the idea of protecting the emigrant trail, but too many acres were included in the bill.

Larie Trippet: The RACs should be involved in validation of the existing roads and trails (not just designated routes) that will not be closed.

Jim Jeskey: Expressed concern with preserving public access to the region.

Bennie Romero: Agrees with Steve Kerns. If the opinions of the advisory councils cannot make a difference members are wasting their time. The RACs provide advice from the ground up.

Tebeau Piquet: Private property and private in holdings should be addressed. He is concerned with adverse condemnation issues.

Dan Heinz: The RACs should host an advisory committee as part of the management planning process. He does not support modifying the legislation. Most of the key parties were invited to participate in drafting the bill, but chose to oppose the bill and disenfranchised themselves. There is enormous public support for the designation. Heinz pointed out these are national lands and a delicate balance was achieved in the legislation.

Regarding access, Heinz noted that many people do not like to see machines in wild places. He said everyone who visits the region uses off highway vehicles to a point, but the wilderness designations provide a place where people can have respite from the machinery.

Robert Kautz: The advisory councils need to find a meaningful way to participate in the planning process.

Hugh Judd: Questioned whether the RACs' recommendations will carry any weight. He is concerned with access for wildlife management, wild horse and burro management, and fire management. He questioned how Native American concerns will be addressed.

Gerry Nordstrom: The members need to fully assess the amount of time they can devote to participating in the planning process. If members are not able to fully participate, the BLM should recommend that an NCA advisory council be created as part of the technical amendment legislation.

Terry Reed reminded the members that their role is to provide advice to the BLM, not to help create legislation. Nevada Communications Chief Jo Simpson added that any advisory council created for the NCA would work for the executive branch of government, providing advise on implementation of the legislation.

Jerry Hepworth: The advisory councils should advise the BLM on implementation strategy, not the “nuts and bolts” of day to day operations.

John Falen: The RACs should help the BLM eliminate as many on the ground conflicts as possible.

Mark Farman: Sees three key issues: finding a process to provide input to the BLM from all interests; assuring continued access to the region for existing rights and multiple uses, including wildlife management and habitat management; and continued access to control invasive species, including cheat grass.

Sherm Swanson: An advisory council for the NCA could be established under an existing Memorandum of Understanding that authorizes the use of Coordinated Resource Management Planning Groups (CRMPs). A CRMP could be composed of a diversity of persons with a passion for the area, freeing the RAC for other important ongoing work such as the Great Basin Restoration Project and ecosystem work.

Gerry Emm: The BLM needs to continue consultation with the tribes, particularly Summit Lake, Ft. McDermitt, Ft. Bidwell and Pyramid Lake.

Karen Boeger: There are two tiers of involvement. The RACs should be involved during the three-year development of the NCA management plan. Another committee should be established to continue providing management advice after the planning is completed. Issues fall into two groups: NCA related and wilderness related, with wilderness issues already addressed by the BLM’s wilderness regulations. The focus now should be on the NCA planning process.

Don Klusman (audience): Suggested the RACs recommend that the Secretary create an advisory group specific for the NCA.

Wilderness Overview

Paul Brink, the wilderness program leader for the BLM California State Office provided an overview of the Wilderness Act of 1964, including a brief history (handout).

Steve Smith, wilderness program lead for the BLM Nevada State Office discussed the BLM's wilderness management regulations (handout).

Pat Cantrall (audience) said she was concerned the BLM will not be able to fund additional positions needed to manage the new NCA and wilderness areas. BLM managers responded that BLM is directing discretionary funds from other budget areas to help fund NCA planning, but all attempts are being made to avoid reducing field office budgets to cover NCA costs.

Tebeau Piquet and Karen Boeger agreed that even though the RACs can not participate in the BLM budget process, individuals can make their feelings known about the BLM's need for funding to adequately manage the area.

NCA Planning

Terry Reed provided an overview of the NCA preplan that has just been completed. The internal document is a first effort at outlining the planning process and the anticipated planning issues. He distributed copies of the preplan. Scoping meetings, in which members of the public will help identify planning issues will be the first public participation aspect of the process. The meetings will be followed by development of planning alternatives and draft environmental analysis, followed by a final plan and EIS. Deadline for completion of the management plan is December 2003.

Tibeau Piquet and Nancy Huffman questioned whether the EIS will include economic analysis. Reed responded that the analysis will look at economic effects to communities, but will not compare impacts to a situation with no NCA.

Pat Cantrall (audience) urged the BLM and RAC members to consider economic impacts on Modoc County.

Tina Nappe noted that discussion has tended to focus on negative impacts the designation might have on traditional commodity uses. She said there are opportunities for tourism benefits, and said gateway communities could benefit.

Discussion continued about tourism and related impacts. Dan Heinz expressed a desire for everyone to experience the thrill of discovery that he enjoyed when he discovered the region for himself. He said signing, advertising and promotion robs people of that thrill and degrades the area for people who already know about it.

Bob Abbey responded that the area has already been discovered through events such as Burning Man. A key management challenge will be determining the limits of acceptable change. Managers will need to determine when visitation impacts are affecting values of the region and development management actions to deal with the impacts.

RAC Involvement in Management

The councils discussed several approaches:

- The two councils could work independently and provide advice to the BLM as they do on other issues.
- The two RACs could work jointly to provide NCA management advice.
- A subgroup could be formed with members of both RACS.
- A subgroup could include members from both RACs and other interests.
- Subgroups could be formed to address site-specific issues.

The group consensus was to form a subgroup of interested RAC members and interests from outside the councils. Scoping and a partnership training course will be their first business.

The initial membership will include:

Members from the Northwest Nevada and Northeast California RACs:

Jim Jeskey

Huel Morphis

Karen Boeger

Hugh Judd

Gerry Emm (or a member from the Summit Lake Reservation)

Nancy Huffman

Mark Farman (will find a representative from Nevada state government)

Jerry Hepworth

Others:

Jim Linebaugh (range issues)

Chuck Dodd (Oregon-California Trails Association)

Don Klusman (California Association of Four Wheel Drive Clubs)

Susie Bunyard (Surprise Valley Chamber of Commerce)

Pat Cantrall (Modoc County Board of Supervisors)

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Additionally, Terry Reed will offer a seat to someone from the Gerlach area and representatives from Washoe, Humboldt and Pershing county governments.

The group's first meeting will be called after the preplan is approved, tentatively June 20 and 21.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Note: Handouts referenced in these summary minutes are on file at the Bureau of Land Management offices in Susanville, CA and Carson City, NV. Contact Public Affairs Officers Mark Struble, (775) 885-6107 or Jeff Fontana (530) 257-5381.